

The Business Monthly

Hope Blossoming for Cancer Patients With County Program

By Laura Fick

Virginia Frank and her husband have long been involved in tourism and educational efforts throughout Howard County. As members of the Farm City Committee and the Howard County Antique Farm Machinery Club, the two have recently extended their participation in county activities through another endeavor that touched them near and dear to their hearts.

On Sept. 23 at the Howard County Living Farm Heritage Museum, the Franks became part of the Blossoms of Hope program, a philanthropic project aimed at planting cherry trees across Howard County to beautify and beckon people to the area.

For Frank, a breast cancer survivor, the project meant even more. It also carries a central message of hope for individuals and families within the community who are coping with cancer.

C'mon and See

"Blossoms of Hope is kind of near and dear to my heart for several different reasons," Frank said. "It's touching me personally in several different ways."

At the annual Farm Heritage Days, the Franks, along with Howard County officials, unveiled 13 new cherry trees, including one that Frank's husband and daughters purchased as a Mother's Day gift in her honor. Besides giving hope to cancer survivors like Frank, the trees will also serve as a tourism vehicle for the Farm.

"It's going to be a draw," she said. "I think it's great for the county and it's great for us."

The ultimate goal of Blossoms of Hope, which was developed by Howard County Tourism, is to plant 1,000 cherry trees across Howard County that would blossom simultaneously each April, similar to the famed trees in Washington, D.C. Each cherry tree officially planted as part of this project offers a sponsorship opportunity for individuals looking to make a difference in their community, with 30% of each fee — which ranges from \$125 to \$1,000 — donated to Howard County's Claudia Mayer Cancer Resource & Image Center.

"Howard County Tourism wanted to bring something new to the county that would be a tourist attraction," said Amanda Hof, special events and project manager for Howard County Tourism. "They looked around the region to see what other counties were doing. We really don't have mountains, and we don't have a beach, so we looked to Washington, D.C.

"We saw what they've been doing with the cherry blossoms there — we looked at that and said that's something we can do," she said. "And, we added an extra component that D.C. doesn't have. Not only will we plant the trees throughout the county, but we'll use them as a charitable

donation."

Ready for Phase Three

At Howard County Tourism's annual meeting in late August, County Executive Jim Robey announced that in less than two years the program's goal had been met through the help of residents, businesses and partners throughout the county. More than 1,000 trees have been committed with more than \$25,000 going to support the Cancer Center.

Robey also launched the much-anticipated third phase of the program, which allows for the purchase of trees to be planted in residential areas — this accompanies the first two phases, which focused on planting trees on public and corporate land, respectively.

"The project is about hope for the individuals and families in the community who are coping with cancer," said Hof. "I think that's a large part of why it's been received so well. We will have a new goal. We're looking to the future, and we hope to grow the project."

In addition, Robey announced a special partnership with Camberley Homes, which will plant 275 trees in its upscale Riverwood community, which is in development in Ellicott City.

"As a division of Winchester Homes, we are committed to giving back to the communities where we do business," said Matt Lefler, director of operations of Camberley. "Blossoms of Hope gives us the opportunity to support a great cause and to beautify our streetscape at Riverwood."

Buy a Tree

Trees will continue to be planted in areas throughout the county, including Centennial Park and Howard County Central Library. Cherry trees are available for sale in and around the East Columbia Branch Library, Elkridge Branch Library and Schooley Mill Park.

In addition, Howard County Tourism will hold its first "Cherrybration" event in spring 2007. While details are still largely secret, it will be a large-scale event where residents and visitors alike can enjoy the new trees and the benefits Howard County has to offer.

"What we are expecting as far as tourism benefits are a draw not only for people who already live here, but for people who are from counties afar," said Hof. Blossoms of Hope "is about the community. It's about providing beauty for the community and also providing hope."

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